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ABSTRACT

In the mid-1980's, the paradigm used by business and elected leaders for viewing higher education shifted toward an emphasis on accountability and institutional effectiveness. In general, community colleges have been more responsive than senior colleges to accountability mandates, in part because community colleges have measured their progress in terms of student success and community impact. Moreover, community colleges should embrace the institutional effectiveness paradigm since it provides them with new opportunities to prove their value to their communities and the nation. First, institutional effectiveness measures allow colleges to offer consistent and comparable information to government policy makers and the public. Second, they help community colleges demonstrate their value to communities through the provision of cost-effective strategies for preparing a highly educated workforce. Third, they can help community colleges improve teaching and learning. Midlands Technical College (MTC), in South Carolina, has implemented institutional effectiveness measures since 1987. In collecting effectiveness data, three of the outcomes examined by the college include client satisfaction, focusing on student retention; institutional climate, including the use of effectiveness measures and employee participation to restructure the college; and student learning, focusing on transfer student success, career graduate placement, and employer evaluations of graduates. Finally, in addressing these outcomes, MTC has made a commitment to assessing and improving effectiveness at the classroom level, including projects to examine outcomes for developmental and mathematics education. (TGI)

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Seize the Opportunity

The mid-1980's marked a paradigm shift in the way business leaders and elected officials think about and deal with higher education. Ted Marchese, Editor of Change Magazine wrote, "In my professional lifetime, few issues have vexed the academic world so deeply as accountability has today. It is the watchword of the decade."[1]

This new way of viewing higher education goes by a variety of titles.

- government officials call it accountability
- accrediting officials call it institutional effectiveness
- faculty members call it assessment
- unfortunately, too many faculty and administrators call it a fad

A decade later, this new approach to evaluating the role of education in American society has taken on the characteristics of a movement.

- over 40 states have accountability mandates
- many states have incorporated outcomes data into funding formulas
- all six regional accrediting bodies focus on outcomes
- the federal government has passed student right-to-know legislation
- business leaders who have reorganized and restructured their work-places are calling for a similar response from higher education.
- In summary, everybody seems to be asking college leaders, "What and how much are your students learning?"

What does all this attention to institutional effectiveness and accountability have to do with community colleges? In my view, the answer can be summarized in one word - OPPORTUNITY!

From their inception, community colleges have been results- oriented. We have, as a movement, measured our progress in terms of student success and community impact. Before it was fashionable or required, community colleges regularly reported placement data, licensure exam scores, retention rates, transfer success and economic impact. Therefore, it is not surprising that researchers like Peter Ewell report that community colleges are more responsive than senior colleges to accountability mandates.[2]

Think with me this morning about institutional effectiveness offering to community colleges our greatest opportunity in 100 years to be understood and valued for our contribution to our community and nation and to be measured by our own standards.

For most of our history, we have been compared to and measured by senior college standards - and have not measured up. It is not that the standards were too high - they were the wrong standards. We must not miss this opportunity to establish a

new paradigm for evaluating community colleges.

A sculptor depicted opportunity as a swift runner who had bushy hair on the front of his head, but bald on the back. When asked why he depicted opportunity in such an unusual way, he replied that opportunity must be seized when it approaches, because when it is past there is no retrieving it. Today I challenge us to seize the opportunity of institutional effectiveness to accomplish three things:

I. Institutional Effectiveness Offers Community Colleges the Opportunity to do the Right Thing

An American public that invests more than $400 billion a year on education has a right to call for a report card - even from higher education. Since higher education is about teaching and learning, about preparing for life, and about influencing values, we should expect to be held accountable. The surprise should be over higher education's resistance to the accountability movement.

The president of a major land grant university was describing the resistance of his faculty to the restructuring of the university. He noted that you would expect well-educated faculty who purport to be on the cutting edge of knowledge to be the leaders of the movement. Unfortunately, at his university they were leading the resistance.

Recently, three major national educational associations (AACC, AASCU, NAULGC) appointed a joint commission on accountability. Their published report entitled Accountability of Colleges and Universities said, "Accountability reporting is the right thing to do. The credibility of the higher education community is suffering because of a lack of consistent, comparable information available to government policy makers and the public."[3] The question is no longer, "Should we be accountable?" but, "How shall we demonstrate accountability?"

Not only does institutional effectiveness offer us the opportunity to do the right thing,

II. Institutional Effectiveness Offers Community Colleges the Opportunity to Demonstrate Their Value.

As noted earlier, community colleges have lived in the shadow of the research university. We have been criticized in several national studies for not living up to senior college standards. The accountability movement provides an opportunity for community colleges to define for the pubic our mission and expected outcomes.

However, recent research suggests that the mission of the community college correlates with the current needs and priorities of our nation.

Dr. James Harvey and associates conducted a major study for the American Council on Education to evaluate the public perception of higher education. He analyzed all the public surveys of higher education between 1989-1992 and organized focus groups

in the four quadrants of the country to affirm the accuracy of his findings. He found that (1) the general public believes the purpose of a college education is to acquire a credential for employment; and (2) community and business leaders surveyed by Harvey believe that the principal role of colleges and universities is to prepare a highly educated workforce.[4] Both perceptions match the mission of the community college. As taxpayers and elected officials talk about "return on investment" and appeal for public agencies to offer cost effective solutions to the challenges facing our nation; community college leaders are offered our greatest opportunity to promote the relevance and responsiveness of our institutions.

Finally, in addition to providing an opportunity to do the right thing and to demonstrate value:

III. Institutional Effectiveness offers Community Colleges the Opportunity to Improve Teaching and Learning.

By asking good, hard questions about what our students are learning, community colleges are improving the teaching and learning process.

Someone quipped:

> "Your doing good - that's good"
> "Your doing bad - that's good"
> "You don't know - that's bad"

It is no longer acceptable for a college to say we do not know or cannot measure the outcomes of education. While complex and difficult, we must make the effort. Therefore, our college has made a sincere effort to define and measure the impact of our college on our students and community. Eventhough we are not perfect, we are persistent.

Midlands Technical College was fortunate to get in on the ground floor of the institutional effectiveness movement. I served as Chair of the Commission on Colleges in the mid-1980's when SACS moved from process to outcomes oriented accreditation. Realizing the growing movement toward outcomes assessment, I volunteered our institution to pursue reaffirmation of accreditation in 1987 using the new Criteria that focused on outcome measures. We developed a comprehensive planning and evaluation system that was adopted as the core management strategy for our college.

We asked three questions:

- What is the mission of our college?
- What are the major results we expect from the achievement of our mission?

- What specific evidence are we willing to accept that these results have actually been achieved?

We have attempted to answer those questions by agreeing on six factors critical to the success of our college and nineteen indicators (measures) of effectiveness for which we developed standards (benchmarks). The application of this process has paid dividends for our college.

As we attempt to use the data collected in the process to plan and make decisions, we have been guided by the advice of Phil Crosby of the Total Quality Management movement. He said, "It is not what you find, but what you do with what you find."[5]

We have attempted to use the data to celebrate success and to improve deficiencies. Fortunately, most community colleges find that the measurement of outcomes provides multiple opportunities to recognize and reward faculty and staff for their accomplishments. However, the real test of an effectiveness program is the willingness and ability of an institution to utilize data to improve the administrative and teaching processes at the college.

I will conclude by offering you some examples of how an institutional effectiveness program has helped us to improve the programs and services of the college.

It is important to keep in mind that institutional effectiveness is more of a process than an event. The education of our diverse student body is a complex process that does not easily lend itself to quantifiable data, charts and formulas demanded by the agencies to whom we are accountable. Therefore, the examples I will offer may seem simple and anecdotal. Snapshots of effectiveness information are often incomplete because they represent one moment in a perpetual journey toward becoming the kind of institution we affirm ourselves to be in our mission statement.

I have arbitrarily chosen three categories, among many, as examples of the use of institutional effectiveness data.

- client satisfaction
- institutional climate
- student learning

1. Client Satisfaction

No matter how effective we may perceive ourselves to be, a more important measure is the perceptions of our students and community. Therefore, two of our critical success factors deal with these perceptions.

- Enrolled students' satisfaction and retention.
- Alumni satisfaction and success.

The retention of students to goal attainment may be the community college's greatest challenge. In the opinion of our critics we have not done a very good job with retention. The national average for retention from freshman to sophomore year is 52 percent according to the American College Testing Association and the graduation rate of community colleges using student right-to-know legislation definitions is approximately 20-25 percent.

At Midlands Technical College, one of our most important of our nineteen indicators of success is retention of students. To measure this indicator, we have developed a longitudinal tracking system. The initial data revealed our retention rate to be 46.4 percent - below the national average and our benchmark. Believing we should be better than average, we have implemented a number of intervention strategies.

- In 1988-89 student surveys of satisfaction revealed dissatisfaction with registration and in-take processes. We formed two (2) cross-functional groups of front line associates and students to redesign the registration process and make it more user friendly.

- We also implemented a number of measures like interactive student orientation programs and several special freshman year courses to inform students on success strategies (COL 103 on Study Skills, IDS 102 on Career Planning and Orientation).

- We implemented entering student advisement centers on both campuses.

- And, we set application and registration deadlines to make sure students are in class on the critical first day of the term, when faculty are laying the foundation for productive learning.

- Our retention rate for first-time freshmen has increased by 10 percent over five (5) years to 56 percent. Surveys reveal increased student satisfaction with these services at a 90 percent plus satisfaction level which meets our standards.

2. Institutional Climate

In order to respond to increasing enrollments with declining budgets, we must have a work climate that encourages associates to give 100 percent of their energy to providing quality client services. Critical success factor number six is "dynamic organizational involvement and development."

- College Restructuring

It may seem unusual to use a negative experience to illustrate a positive change in college culture. In 1991, due to a decline in state resources, our college had to reduce our college operating budget by $2M. Our restructuring

process was guided by the institutional effectiveness process in making the budget reduction. We engaged the college community in a process to identify the programs and services that were least essential to achieving the mission of the college. All functions of the college from teaching to mowing the grass were identified (128). College associates were asked to place an equal number of activities (32) into four quadrants, with one being the highest priority and four the lowest. All personnel and services reductions were made from quadrant four functions.

3. Student Learning

The ultimate test of institutional effectiveness is assessing what and how much our students are learning. What value do we add to students from their point of entry until they exit our college? Some indicators of value added are:

- Success of transfer students
- Placement of career program graduates
- Perceptions of employers of graduates
- Quality of teaching and learning

We measure these major outcome factors on an annual basis. However, to improve these important outcomes we must assess and improve effectiveness at the classroom level. I will offer these examples of classroom research.

Developmental Studies

In the late 1980's a longitudinal study of over 600 students enrolled in developmental studies courses, we found that over 20 percent of them remained in developmental courses longer than one year with some students remaining in developmental courses as long as three years. Further, our developmental studies faculty had agreed on a standard of having developmental studies students do as well in subsequent courses as non-developmental studies students. We fell short of that standard. As a result of these less than positive institutional effectiveness data, several actions were taken. A leadership change was made in the chair of the Developmental Studies Department. Under the leadership of a new chair the faculty undertook a complete revision of the developmental studies curriculum, moving from a self-paced individualized program to a teacher-directed, tightly-structured program with clear course objectives and required time frame for completing objectives in series of courses in each subject area. In a recent study looking at time spent in developmental courses for the period from Fall 1992 to Fall 1995, we found only one student out of over 6,000 who had remained in developmental courses more than one year. At the same time, student success rates in the next courses after exiting developmental studies courses increased.

Mathematics

Our Math department, using institutional effectiveness data, has been especially successful in increasing the success rate of students in college algebra. In 1992, the success rate was 65 percent, meaning 35 percent or 470 students each academic year were unsuccessful in this one course -- an unacceptable statistic for us. Our math faculty collected multiple measurements of aggregate and classroom data to track students' progress through the pre-requisite courses into the college algebra course. They discovered missing and duplicate content in the curriculum as well as instructional methods which better prepare students to succeed in subsequent courses. Therefore, they upgraded the curriculum in pre-requisite courses and required departmental exit exams of all faculty. As a result two years later, in academic year 1994-95, the success rate in college algebra was 79 percent -- a significant improvement.

I will close with a story reportedly told by Dr. Martin Luther King. A minister was invited to fill in for a senior minister who was away from his church. His ten-year-old son was seated on the front row. The chairman of the deacons lead the preliminaries. Among the spirited congregational singing were interspersed three offerings - one for the church, one for the poor and one for the approaching anniversary of the pastor. With the lengthy preliminaries concluded, the guest minister delivered one of his best sermons and returned to the front pew. The deacon called for a special offering for the guest minister. The offering plate began at the row where the guest minister and his son were seated. Wanting to "prime the pump" the minister put in a crisp $20 bill. When the service ended the deacon handed the minister an envelope which he put in his coat pocket. As he drove home he could not contain his curiosity. He opened the envelope to find one crisp $20 bill. They rode in silence for a while. Finally, the minister turned to his son and asked, "What did you learn from this experience?" The son replied, "If you had put more in, you would have gotten more out." There seems to be a parable here for community colleges.

The Institutional Effectiveness movement offers a significant opportunity for community colleges to demonstrate their value and effectiveness. However, there are no guarantees. You get out of institutional effectiveness what you put into it.

Through institutional effectiveness processes and information, community colleges have a great opportunity to affirm our worth to our communities and collectively to our nation. Let's seize the opportunity.

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